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ABSTRACT

This paper describes an inservice program at Lenoir Rhyne College that is designed to improve the professional quality of cooperating teachers, aid the college in continuing a program in formative evaluation with the goal of improving designs for professional laboratory experiences, and enrich the student teacher's insight into his own growth experiences during student teaching. Initially, cooperating teachers, student teachers, and education department faculty meet for an orientation session. The second segment of the program is a series of three one-hour conferences between the college supervisor and the cooperating teacher in the public school setting, with one session involving the student teacher. These meetings are designed to balance time and topics with the goals of the program and the needs of the cooperating teacher. During the sixth week, cooperating teachers visit college classes in their major academic areas while the student teacher substitutes in their classrooms. This segment of the program is designed to acquaint the cooperating teachers with recent changes in basic core course organization and curricular designs of academic majors. The final segment is a three-hour session on campus at the close of the semester. The first two hours are devoted to professional growth experience for the cooperating teacher. The student teachers are included in the final hour which is an evaluative seminar. During this time an evaluative instrument of the semantic differential-short answer type is completed. (PD)

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DEVELOPING COMPETENT COOPERATING TEACHERS: A CHALLENGE TO TEACHER EDUCATORS

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The transition of many teacher training programs to a competency-based approach with a variety of in-depth field experiences seems to have widened the gap between departments of education and in-service teachers who are a vital link in implementing experiential components. This lack of articulation about the program goals of the teacher training institution undoubtedly causes much of the current conflict, anxiety, and insecurity suffered by many college students and cooperating teachers.

Too often the cooperating teacher gives a cursory glance to the packet of forms and guidelines provided by the college, files them in his bottom drawer, and begins his relationship with the student teacher by exemplifying one of the following attitudes:

1. "It's my responsibility as a professional to do all that is in my power to provide you with experiences that will help you become a good teacher (a carbon copy of my personal stereotype of good)."
2. "You have been placed here to help me so that I will have more time to do my work (or to socialize in the teachers' room)."
3. "You have been placed here because my principal feels I must be inadequate. Therefore, I must resist any bid you

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make to control this class (e.g. 'teach them'), because I perceive you as a threat."

Due to the prevalence of these attitudes, an absence of academic or experience criteria for selection of cooperating teachers, and lack of a substantial honorarium for many cooperating teachers from the state or the teacher training institution, the gauntlet seems to have been thrown down to colleges and universities. This challenge is one of devising innovative and attractive in-service programs for cooperating teachers at a minimum expense of time and personnel.

The need to upgrade the quality of cooperating teachers was recognized by the North Carolina State Department of Public Instruction in 1970 as they authorized undergraduate schools of education to implement a free voluntary one-credit renewal program for teachers currently supervising a student teacher of that institution. The nature of the program was left to the discretion of each college, pending approval of the initial planning framework by the state department and assurances that the program would provide sixteen contact hours.

The purpose of this paper is to describe such an in-service program which has been operative at Lenoir Rhyne College since 1971. The program has been offered twice a year with credit available to the individual elementary and secondary teacher only once in a five-year renewal period.

Considered in non-behavioral terms, the program was designed to

1. Improve the professional quality of cooperation teachers with the companion reward of certificate renewal credit.
2. Aid the college in continuing a program in formative evaluation with the goal of improving various designs for

professional laboratory experiences.

3. Enrich the student teacher's insight into his own growth experiences during the student teaching practicum.

Operationally, improving the "professional quality" of cooperating teachers was purported to include updating their knowledge of trends in curriculum development and classroom individualization, widening their view of the learning potential of the student teaching experience, and aiding them to provide more constructive evaluation of student teacher performance.

As this undergraduate liberal arts college has had minimal input into the actual teaming of the student teacher with his cooperating teacher, a salient competency of the program emerged. That is, through the importation of knowledge about current trends in curriculum and classroom management during seminar and large group meetings, the cooperating teacher during his interactions with members of the college staff and his student teacher would indicate an understanding of the college's role as a teacher trainer and his role as an adjunct to the college staff.

Although the framework underlying this competency is, in retrospect, a bit naive, it did provide a rationale and starting point for the program.

The particular in-service model was designed to provide professional seminars, conferences, and campus visitations during the student teaching semester. During each semester that the program was offered, the initial contact with in-service teachers was made during an evening meeting held early in the semester while the students were involved in the six-week campus-based professional education component. The meeting was attended

by all cooperating teachers, student teachers, and education department faculty. Following a get-acquainted dinner or social hour, information was given relevant to the voluntary nature, purposes, proposed content and activities of the program before cooperating teachers were asked to commit themselves in writing and forward a statement of their superintendent's approval of their participation in the program.

The three-hour evening meeting included a prominent speaker, a recent film, or a panel discussion relevant to the importance and changing nature of the student teaching experience. Small groups of students and their cooperating teachers were then assembled with individual college supervisors for the purposes of clarifying state and college requirements and policies, as well as sharing individual philosophies. Teachers desiring to participate in the in-service program remained to schedule the additional thirteen contact hours of the course. Participants were given a statement of suggested cooperating teacher competencies formulated by AACTE (1) and an appropriate journal article such as that of Danzer (2) on the range of profitable experiences during student teaching.

The second phase of the program was a series of three one-hour conferences between the college supervisor and the cooperating teacher in the public school setting, with one session involving the student teacher. College supervisors were instructed to balance time and topics with the multiple goals of the program in mind and at the same time meet the needs and interests of the cooperating teacher. Several education faculty developed a packet of appropriate reading materials (3,4,5) to be mailed to the course participants with the intent of providing a basis for these discussions. An especially thought provoking enclosure was a sampling

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of realistic comments by past student teachers which described specific problems and pleasures encountered during their practicum experiences. The cooperating teacher was asked to share the packet of reading materials with his student teacher and to interact with him about them at random as well as during scheduled conferences. Both were given copies of state-adopted competencies for their particular grade level and/or subject area (6). The final packet enclosure was a brief questionnaire concerning the impact of the course to be submitted to the individual college supervisor at the final evaluative seminar on campus.

During the sixth week of the eight-week student teaching practicum, the cooperating teachers were invited to campus for a six-hour-day visit to college classes in their major academic areas, while the student teacher substituted in their classrooms. College supervisors and appropriate college faculty developed tentative class and conference schedules for the course participants. This phase of the program was designed to acquaint the cooperating teachers with recent changes in basic core course organization and curricular designs of academic majors. Another intent of the day on campus was to give the cooperating teachers a further insight into the actual type of pre-service preparation their student teacher had received.

During an orientation session, the course participants were given maps of the campus, college class schedules, catalogues and divisional brochures to serve as a guide for the day's experiences and a basis for the culminating seminar with the education faculty. A "Dutch Lunch" and a flexible schedule provided time for informal interaction with various college faculty and each other, as well as an opportunity to browse in

the Curriculum Laboratory.

The final segment of the total in-service program was a three-hour afternoon session on campus at the close of the semester. Two hours of this session were devoted to professional growth experiences such as a speaker and slide-tape presentation about the British Infant Schools; films on relevant secondary curriculum and nongradeness; pertinent role-playing and simulation sessions on educational problems; and exhibits of student teacher projects such as learning centers, unit-related audio-visual illustrations, etc.

Student teachers substituted for a half-day and joined their cooperating teachers for an hour evaluative seminar at the close of the session. Both student teachers and cooperating teachers completed an evaluative instrument of a semantic differential-short answer type. The instrument elicited cooperating teachers' feelings about the various phases of the in-service program as well as an assessment of their interpersonal relationships with their student teachers. The form for student teachers requested ratings of all education related courses, recommendations for improvement, and their perceived impact of the in-service program on relationships with cooperating teachers.

The results of the evaluation were tallied, analyzed, and used by the education faculty in structuring subsequent semesters of the in-service program. The evaluation of the program indicated that participating teachers were generally satisfied with the informal nature and substance of the program. Suggestions were made for limiting the scope of the program, clarifying its purposes, and publicizing topics for the large and small group seminars prior to a particular semester.

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Data from the student teachers indicated a trend toward more open communications and more positive interpersonal relationships with cooperating teachers who had participated in the in-service program than those who had not, although this did not approach a level of significance. A measure of the success of this in-service program has been mirrored by the increasing demand from teachers to participate and an effort on the part of the college to place student teachers with cooperating teachers who have participated in the renewal course.

Several rewarding tangential effects have also been noted. The campus visitation served to orient general faculty of the college to the current needs and concerns of public school teachers, as well as give the teachers helpful insight into the changing preparation of student teachers prior to practicum. Through efforts to compile helpful reading material and plan appropriate programs for group meetings, college supervisors have developed more meaningful rapport and respect for the role of the cooperating teacher. Very important to the teacher educator is the long-range projection that the experiences described have given student teachers a wider perspective of their own professional program, preparing them more ably to assume the responsible role of superversing teachers in the future.

Thus as the old order of isolated course requirements and campus-bound programs yields to the performance-based approach, a critical need has arisen for meaningful orientation of the cooperating teacher both to change in the professional preparation program of the college and to change in his vital role. This pressing need to <u>implement knowledgeable and cooperative change</u> plus the profitable results of the in-service program described herein brought into focus and fulfillment the idea of a two-

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credit-hour campus workshop on "The Role of the Cooperating Teacher," which was conducted during the summer of 1973.

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